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SUBJECT: FRANCE ON PRODI/HAMAS CALL: "SHOCKED," BUT NO ACTION PLANNED

REF: A. STATE 63196

[B](#). PARIS 2272

[C](#). PARIS 2593

Classified By: PolMC Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: French MFA officials responsible for EU CFSP and the Middle East told us April 21 that they were "shocked" by Prodi's agreement to receive a phone call from a political-level Hamas member. However, citing the fact that Prodi was not yet a government official at the time of the call, they indicated that Prodi's action, while regrettable, would not impel the GOF to protest either bilaterally or within an EU framework. That said, no doubt in part in response to these and other complications that have already risen in connection with the Quartet conditions, we were told that the May 15 meeting of EU foreign ministers will aim to define EU policy toward Hamas in the areas of political vs. technical contacts, humanitarian assistance, and visas. Separately, the MFA spokesman confirmed April 21 that the GOF has rejected the visa application of PA Planning Minister Samir Abou Isa to attend an April 26-28 conference in Paris. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Deputy PolCouns raised ref A points April 21 with EU CFSP Unit Deputy Pascal Le Deunff to stress U.S. concern that PM-designate Prodi's political-level contact with a Hamas member had crossed EU and U.S. redlines, inform him that the U.S. was in the process of bringing our concerns directly to Prodi's attention, and inquire about the GOF's reaction and its willingness to do likewise.

[1](#)3. (C) Le Deunff responded that the GOF was already well aware of Prodi's call and assured us that he had been "personally shocked" by it, a sentiment he believed was generally shared within the MFA. That said, the GOF did not intend to take any action, mainly because it had come to the conclusion that Prodi, technically speaking, had not violated the EU consensus position on contacts with Hamas. Le Deunff explained that Prodi had acted in his capacity as PM-designate and therefore was (at least, not yet) an official member of the Italian government. EU foreign ministers, he said, had decided to ban contacts between government officials and Hamas, but these restrictions did not apply to MPs and other non-specified parties with political interests.

[1](#)4. (C) In this particular instance, reiterating that the GOF deemed Prodi to have acted "personally," Le Deunff said the GOF fully expected that Prodi would adhere precisely to the EU's position once he officially assumed his duties as prime minister. Le Deunff also wondered aloud what purpose a representation to the Italian MFA would serve, given that the foreign minister would soon be replaced under a Prodi government.

[1](#)5. (C) Noting the GOF's reticence in approaching the Italians directly, Deputy PolCouns queried whether there was an upcoming EU discussion of Hamas that might permit France to note, perhaps without mentioning Italy directly, that such contacts set an unhelpful precedent. Le Deunff responded immediately that France would be unwilling to single out Italy for criticism "within the EU family." That said, he noted that EU foreign ministers would meet on May 15 to try to define with more specificity the EU's positions on political contacts with Hamas, assistance, and visas (including on such issues such as travel to COE meetings -- see also ref B).

[1](#)6. (C) In response to a question from Deputy PolCouns, Le Deunff confirmed that the ministers would also discuss the distinction between "political" and "technical" contacts (see also ref C), arguing that it would not be possible to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians without such technical contacts. Le Deunff summed up the challenge as one of preserving EU insistence that Hamas accept the Quartet principles, while providing economic assistance to the Palestinians and avoiding the "asphyxiation" of the Palestinian people.

17. (C) On a separate, but related issue, the MFA spokesman confirmed April 21 that the GOF had rejected the visa application of PA Planning Minister Samir Abou Isa to attend an April 26-28 conference in Paris (ref C). The spokesman explained that the decision was taken in consultation with the GOF's European partners and was in accordance with the common European position suspending political contacts with the Palestinian government as long as it did not accept the three conditions advocated by the EU -- non-violence, recognition of Israel, and respect for existing accords. The underlying factors, according to the spokesman, were that the official requesting the visa was a minister, and the conference in question was taking place under President Chirac's patronage with FM Douste-Blazy as an official speaker -- thereby crossing the redline of political contacts.

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Stapleton